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## BOOK REVIEWS.

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### THE TEXT-BOOK IN THE STUDY OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE.

IN order to discuss this matter thoroughly, a much greater space would have to be devoted to it than this article proposes to occupy; but before giving it even a slight consideration it will be necessary to come to a definite conclusion as to the purpose for which a language is studied.

One may safely say that the serious student of today always has a very definite end in view in undertaking the higher study of a foreign language. That definite end is to be thoroughly master of something, some period, some branch, or some small number of authors. With this in view, his study should be intensive rather than extensive.

It may be objected by some that this is diametrically opposed to the good old watchword, "Lay a broad foundation and then build your fine superstructure." It will be found, however, upon close examination that no such clash occurs, for when the elements of a language have been thoroughly mastered, and an easy reading knowledge of it acquired, so far as that language is concerned, the foundation is laid, and broadly, too. All efforts made after that time are toward the superstructure. The length of time required to lay this broad and solid foundation should be, and most generally is, three years. From that point onward the pupil should begin to specialize, and to lay before himself some definite and narrow course to pursue.

It is just at this point that the text-book begins to be of particular value to the student; for now he has to read somewhat for himself, and as he is not yet in a position to be turned loose in a library, the advice and guidance of eminent specialists are of the greatest value. It is then that a firm and ever-broadening foothold should be most carefully secured, so that he may make a beginning at watching "what main currents draw the years" of the period about which his later knowledge is to center.

Now, a very pertinent question might be: Is our present and general method of throwing courses together conducive to the erection of the fine superstructure? Does it turn out students who can confidently and bravely say: "I know some three men, or even some one man; I can express an intelligent opinion on at least a few topics; I know something." Most emphatically, it does not. (Of course, this is not intended to refer to the larger universities, where each department has a large quota of well-known specialists.) What, think you, can be the definite and ready working knowledge of French writers or literature gained by the ordinary student under the guidance of the ordinary professor from such a year's work as the following: one play from Racine, one from Corneille, two from Molière, one book of fables from La Fontaine, one oration from Bossuet, one selection from Boileau, one play from Voltaire, one novel from Victor Hugo, and one from Dumas? I think all will admit that at best the knowledge will be very scrappy, and anything but thorough; nothing will be really known, nor will a sufficiently firm foothold be gained in a knowledge of any one school or movement, to incite the ordinary student to further and individual study. No, he has read ten isolated texts by the same number of authors, and has come to

look upon the year's work as something uninteresting, useless, aimless, and as a dose to be repeated under compulsion only.

Nor is the effect of this hodge-podge method of compiling courses seen upon the pupil alone; it has a similarly baneful effect upon the teacher too, be he ever so diligent and conscientious. He becomes a devourer of isolated texts. Year after year this continues until he has consumed a very great number, but unfortunately has digested very few. The result of this must certainly be that his knowledge, instead of broadening out on a well-organized basis, becomes fragmentary; he loses interest in his work, and becomes really master of no one man or period. He has not time to make the proper connections between the pieces of literature handled and the times in which they form epochs, or of which they are a mirror. In short, he becomes a text-monger, whose value is continually becoming less both to himself and to his employer.

Now, if this is the case — and I think most people will admit that there is at least more than a grain of truth in it — suggestions for improvement should be quite in order. In the earlier stages of language study — and, in fact, in most branches of education — what is well termed the “laboratory method” is principally used, *i. e.*, the student is taught to draw his own conclusions from the results of series of experiments made by himself. He is given the article or subject, or whatever it may be, to handle, and under guidance is led to analyze and reconstruct it intelligently. “*Agere sciendo et agendo scire disce*,” is the motto of the day in primary work; and why should it not be in secondary? It would be a very false pedagogy that would ask the student to learn chemistry from a text-book nowadays, or to ask him to come to intelligent conclusions about, say, gases in general, if he were only allowed to test oxygen for its power of sustaining combustion, hydrogen for its specific gravity, chlorine for its affinity for oxygen, etc., etc.; and yet, as was shown above, this is the very course followed in the language laboratory.

Since, then, it is really the literature which is being studied in the period which is referred to, this inductive method will apply admirably well. Following it up, our aim should be *non multa sed multum*. But few authors should be read in one year; these should be carefully chosen from one or two schools, or movements in the same age; as many as possible of the works of each should be studied, not skimmed; and, finally, the lives of the authors should be closely coupled with the selections read, and the selections with the movement under consideration.

As the result of the present method is twofold, so would be the effect of this. The teacher would go to work with greater zest, for, having a clear and well defined aim in view, he would feel that he was gaining advancement by his own work; he would also become conscious of approaching a mastery of some few men, or of some period, which would make him more valuable to himself, more valuable to his employers, and an entity in the state.

It would naturally follow, too, that the pupil would be similarly benefited. He seeing a definite goal before him, would be incited to more diligent work; then, when he arrived at one point on the high road of learning, he could look back with a glance of satisfaction upon the road traveled and say: “I know it. Something accomplished, something done, I've earned a night's repose;” and, what is of no small value, he would be induced to make a systematic and complete collection of books, or, in other words, he would gradually build up a library complete in some degree.

If, and since, such is the case, at whose door is the blame to be laid? Is the unfortunate teacher to shoulder the burden, or is it the much-abused spirit of the age?

No, I think not. The spirit of the age is practicability — the very opposite of the course generally adopted; and the teacher is generally a conscientious, hard-working creature, willing to do the best he can with the means at hand. The great deficiency lies, it seems to me, in the modern text-book. Of course, in the present condition of society there is but little inducement for those who are really capable to spend sufficient time to turn out finished and worthy products, and, as a result, others, with various ends in view, make a hasty revision and rearrangement of a few other texts, with the result that a new edition appears containing a few new departures, but at the same time a collection of the faults of the originals.

Just as it was thought necessary to inquire, at the beginning of this paper, into the object of the study of a language, and again to notice the defects in many courses which lead away from the realization of the ideal in language study, so we might here inquire into the real purpose of the annotated text-book, and also notice the commoner defects, thereby preparing the way for the formation of an exact conception of the ideal text.

Even the texts nearest perfection are not meant to take the place of the teacher in any way. Their purpose is, by extending the sphere of influence of the great teacher, the recognized specialist, to give to the earnest teacher the result of special research, and to the honest student direction and advice in his private labors.

How do the ordinary text-books perform this duty? As a whole, very poorly. Of course, there are many noble exceptions, a few of which will be mentioned below. As a rule, however, the ordinary text-book has many faults: inaccuracies and errors are of frequent occurrence; the biographies and introductions, which are most important, are given two or three pages; little or no effort is made to give the piece of literature a place in the movement of the age; a great amount of space is occupied by notes on passages which offer little or no difficulty to the thinking student; little or no literary criticism is offered; very rarely do any philological notes appear although these would often be most helpful to the mediocre teacher and most interesting to the pupil; and, lastly, very seldom is an effort made to publish a series of texts with a definite end in view.

It goes without saying that all of these faults do not exist in any one text-book, but there are sufficient in many to make the careful teacher dissatisfied with them. For example, the impression left upon the earnest student is very bad if, after reading the note on l. 597 of *Le Luthier de Crémone*,<sup>1</sup> he turns to an authentic edition of Coppée and finds that the editor is bringing forward a comparatively new theory and one which has but few advocates, viz., the application of the English "time theory" to French verse, to explain what happens to be a typographical error, as the correct reading is "Filippo" instead of "Filip." Again, in the *French Prose Composition*, by Baillot and Twight-Brugnot,<sup>2</sup> p. 76, at the end of a note on the word *oc* we find the following: "The name came from the way of pronouncing the word *oui* = *oc*," which is very inaccurate, as the word *oui* never was pronounced *oc*, but the word *oc* was used to express affirmation in the south of France, just as *oïl*, which has developed into *oui*, expressed the same idea in northern France. It is quite unnecessary to call

<sup>1</sup> *Le Luthier de Crémone*. By FRANÇOIS COPPÉE. Edited by B. W. WELLS. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. \$0.36.

<sup>2</sup> *French Prose Composition*. By BAILLOT AND TWIGHT-BRUGNOT. Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co. \$0.50.

attention to the books which err with regard to the skimmed and weak character of their introductions, lack of literary criticism, or absence of philological notes, for they are legion.

However, as was said before, all text-books are not bad, and indeed some are very excellent. A series of French text-books<sup>1</sup> which is being brought out by Scott, Foresman & Co., deserves particular attention. First of all, the publishers have hit upon the very good idea that isolated texts are well-nigh useless, and they are publishing a nicely arranged and well-selected series of works from the most representative authors of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. It is to be hoped that this work will be continued, and that in the near future the "Lake Series" may be conscientiously recommended to the student as a fairly representative and not too meager anthology of French literature. It is worth noting that in these texts, which include selections from Molière, Beaumarchais, Hugo, Voltaire, and Chateaubriand, very great stress is laid upon an introduction which presents in concise form (generally occupying 50 pages) the life of the author, discusses the historical importance of the movement to which he belongs, indicates his place in that movement, and makes a critical study of the play as a piece of literature. Another thing which must be said in favor of these texts is that the more important characters in the selections are generally made the subject of a short character-study, thus aiding the student very materially in an intensive study of the selections. Excellent, however, as the "Lake Series" is, it might be very much enhanced in value by the addition of occasional philological notes. One text which has introduced this feature with most beneficial results is *La Mare au Diable*.<sup>2</sup>

We have tried to show that the purpose of the study of a language is to become master of some small part of its literature, rather than to know little or nothing about a very wide range; then to show the beneficial effect which a more concentrated method would have upon both teacher and pupil, to criticise existing courses and texts in the relation they bear to the object of the study of a language, and lastly to point out what seems to us a series of texts which with a few slight emendations would leave little to be desired by either teacher or pupil.

R. J. SPROTT.

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#### SOME FRENCH GRAMMARS.

Is THE instruction given in French in our schools at the present time the result of a regular growth and development, the object in view having been always the same, or would the history of this instruction be a story of experiments in methods and of a standard of attainment not clearly established? Doubtless the truth lies between the two extremes. To say that French is taught, even now, with a single purpose in view would be as far from the facts as to affirm that the manner

<sup>1</sup> MOLIÈRE, *Le Misanthrope, L'Avare*; by GIESE; \$0.50. BEAUMARCHAIS, *Le Barbier de Séville and Lettres*; by FAIRFIELD; \$0.50. HUGO, *Préface de Cromwell, Hernani*; by EFFINGER; \$0.50. VOLTAIRE, *Zaire, Épîtres*; by EGGERT; \$0.50. CHATEAUBRIAND, *Atala, René*; by BOWEN; \$0.50.

<sup>2</sup> *La Mare au Diable*, edited by LEIGH R. GREGOR. Boston: Ginn & Co.